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Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

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Supplement No. 35 (A/58/35)

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Letter of transmittal

9 October 2003

Mr. Secretary-General,

I have the honour to enclose herewith the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for submission to the General Assembly in accordance with paragraph 6 of its resolution 57/107 of 3 December 2002.

The report covers the period from 11 October 2002 to 9 October 2003.

Accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(*Signed*) Papa Louis **Fall**
Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise
of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations
New York

Chapter I

Introduction

1. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established by the General Assembly by resolution 3376 (XXX) of 10 November 1975, with the task of recommending a programme designed to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights as recognized by the Assembly in resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974.

2. The recommendations made by the Committee in its first report to the General Assembly[1] were endorsed by the Assembly as a basis for the solution of the question of Palestine. In its subsequent reports,[2] the Committee has continued to stress that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the following essential principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination. The Committee's recommendations could not be implemented, and the Assembly each year renewed the Committee's mandate and requested it to intensify efforts in pursuit of its objectives.

3. The Committee welcomed the historic breakthrough in the peace process in 1993 and the subsequent important steps towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). At the same time, the Committee continued to work towards the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to its own independent State. The Committee also continued to mobilize international assistance for and solidarity with the Palestinian people.

4. During the year, the Al-Aqsa intifada continued and the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, remained very tense, with violence escalating steeply in August 2003. Fostered by the continuing Israeli occupation, violence and mutual mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians kept chances of resuming a political process firmly on hold. Three years of Israel's military campaign against the Palestinian people have resulted in horrific human and material losses. The campaign has brought misery and destruction, creating a humanitarian emergency on an unprecedented scale.

5. The Quartet continued to work with the parties in an effort to defuse the crisis and breathe life into the political process in pursuance of ideas stipulated in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002). The appointment of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas as the first Palestinian Prime Minister and the confirmation by the Palestinian Legislative Council of his Cabinet were followed by the formal presentation, on 30 April 2003, of "A Performance-Based Road Map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", known as the Road Map. These promising events helped catalyse the political process and triggered a number of changes, albeit tentative, in the situation, including the resumption of security coordination between the two sides and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from some positions in the Gaza

Strip and Bethlehem. The positive momentum created on the ground earlier in the year was scuttled by renewed Israeli operations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, repeated incursions into most Palestinian cities, extrajudicial executions of Palestinians, continued construction of settlements and the separation wall, closures and suicide bombings by Palestinian groups against Israeli civilians. The escalation of violence and counter-violence has substantially impeded progress in negotiations on security-related issues, led to the resignation of Prime Minister Abbas and threatened the implementation of the Road Map. The humanitarian situation remained grave and required serious attention of donor, international relief and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

6. The Committee continued to encourage the parties to resume the political process and move vigorously towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. As the organ of the General Assembly mandated to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee continued to support all initiatives aimed at resolving the question of Palestine in all its aspects until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized.

Chapter II

Mandate of the Committee

7. The mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was again renewed by the General Assembly in resolution 57/107 of 3 December 2002, in which the Assembly, inter alia, expressed its appreciation to the Committee for its efforts in performing the tasks assigned to it and took note of its annual report, including the conclusions and recommendations.[3] The Assembly requested the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, to support the Middle East peace process and to mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people and authorized it to make such adjustments in its approved programme of work as it may consider appropriate and necessary in the light of developments and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session and thereafter. The Assembly requested it to continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to report and make suggestions to the Assembly, the Security Council or the Secretary-General, as appropriate. The Assembly also requested the Committee to continue to extend its cooperation and support to Palestinian and other civil society organizations in order to mobilize international solidarity and support for the achievement by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, and to involve additional civil society organizations in its work.

8. In its resolution 57/108 of 3 December 2002, on the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources and to ensure that it continues to carry out its programme of work as detailed in the relevant earlier resolutions, including, in particular, the organization of meetings in various regions with the participation of all sectors of the international community, the further development and expansion of the documents collection of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine, the preparation and widest possible dissemination of publications and information materials on various aspects of the question of Palestine and the provision of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority. The Assembly also requested the Committee and the Division, as part of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November, to continue to organize an annual exhibit on Palestinian rights in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations and encouraged Member States to continue to give the widest support and publicity to the observance of the International Day of Solidarity.

9. In its resolution 57/109 of 3 December 2002, on the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, the General Assembly requested the Department in full cooperation and coordination with the Committee, to continue, with the necessary flexibility as may be required by developments affecting the question of Palestine, its special information programme for the biennium 2002-2003, including: the preparation and dissemination of publications; continuation of production, expansion and preservation of audio-visual material on the question of Palestine; organization and promotion of fact-finding missions for journalists to the area, including the territory under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority and the Occupied Territory; organization of international, regional and national seminars or encounters for

journalists; and assistance to the Palestinian people in the field of media development.

10. In carrying out its programme of work, the Committee also took into account General Assembly resolution 57/110 of 3 December 2002, in which the Assembly, inter alia: reaffirmed the necessity of achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in all its aspects; expressed its full support for the ongoing peace process and welcomed in this regard the efforts of the Quartet; welcomed the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States at its fourteenth session, held in Beirut on 27 and 28 March 2002; stressed the necessity for a commitment to the vision of the two-State solution and the principle of land for peace, as well as the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002); stressed the need for the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination and the right to their independent State and the need for resolving the problem of the Palestine refugees in conformity with its resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

Chapter III

Organization of work

A. Membership and officers

11. The Committee is composed of the following Member States: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Cyprus, Guinea, Guyana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine.

12. At its 269th meeting, on 14 February 2003, the Committee re-elected Mr. Papa Louis Fall (Senegal) as Chairman, and re-elected Mr. Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) and Mr. Ravan A. G. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) as Vice-Chairmen and Mr. Walter Balzan (Malta) as Rapporteur. At its 271st meeting, the Committee elected Mr. Victor Camilleri (Malta) as Rapporteur, replacing Walter Balzan, former Rapporteur of the Committee, who had been assigned by his Government to another post.

13. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted its programme of work for 2003.[4]

B. Participation in the work of the Committee

14. As in previous years, the Committee reconfirmed that all States Members of and permanent observers to the United Nations wishing to participate in the work of the Committee as observers were welcome to do so. In accordance with established practice, Palestine participated in the work of the Committee as an observer, attended all its meetings and made observations and proposals for consideration by the Committee and its Bureau.

15. On 18 March 2003, the Commission of the African Union, in a note verbale addressed to the Chairman of the Committee, informed him of its decision to join the Committee as an Observer. The Committee welcomed the decision of the African Union and approved the request at its 270th meeting, on 26 March 2003.

16. In 2003, the Committee again welcomed as observers all the States and organizations that had participated in its work in the preceding year.[5]

Chapter IV

Review of the situation relating to the question of Palestine

17. In pursuance of its mandate, the Committee continued to keep under review the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as the relevant political developments. In January and February 2003, the Committee took note of the constructive outcome of a series of meetings on Palestinian civil reform held in London. It welcomed the presentation of the Road Map, a performance-based plan encompassing parallel and reciprocal steps by Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the political, security, economic, humanitarian and institution-building areas monitored and facilitated by the Quartet. The plan was drawn up to assist the parties in realizing the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders, as affirmed in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002). The Committee expressed concern, however, that, while the Palestinian Authority had accepted the Road Map without reservations, the Government of Israel had not fully endorsed it, putting forward a series of conditions for its acceptance that threatened to render most of the plan ineffective. A new hope was created by other important developments, including the reform undertaken by the Palestinian Authority and the confirmation by the Palestinian Legislative Council of a new Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Abbas. The Prime Minister, however, had not been in a position to continue his work and had resigned. His Cabinet was confronted with a serious escalation of violence and Israel's failure to implement its Road Map obligations, in particular those related to ceasing attacks on civilians, freezing settlement construction, halting confiscation or demolition of houses and property and taking other steps to normalize Palestinian life. Efforts by Palestinian organizations to achieve a truce were not reciprocated by Israel. Continuing Israeli military operations led to a breakdown of the truce. Subsequent ceasefire proposals by the Palestinian Authority were rejected by the Israeli Government. Faced with these challenges, the new Prime Minister-designate, Ahmed Qurei, was tasked with forming a Government with a view to continuing the Palestinian reform process and the implementation of the Road Map.

18. Throughout the year, the Committee strongly supported the work of the Quartet, which remained actively engaged with the parties and others with a view to charting a course towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict by 2005. In the Committee's view, the presentation of the Road Map created grounds for cautious optimism that the process would move forward and that the two sides, assisted by the Quartet, would press ahead with the implementation of the plan.

19. Despite some tentative signs of progress, the Committee noted a most disappointing lack of any serious improvement in the security situation, which remained extremely volatile, with a potential for further escalation. The death toll since September 2000 had risen to over 3,600, of whom more than 2,800 were Palestinians and more than 800 Israelis. Over 46,600 Palestinians had been wounded. Most tragically, more than 590 Palestinian and 100 Israeli children had been killed in this period. During the year the Israeli army conducted regular military raids in the Occupied Territory, repeatedly reoccupying Palestinian cities, imposing closures and curfews and using disproportionate and indiscriminate force, including flechette munitions, in civilian areas. Human rights organizations had petitioned Israel's High Court of Justice to ban this type of munitions as causing unnecessary human suffering. In April 2003, however, the Court rejected their

petition. The army operations were often backed up by heavy armour, helicopters and fighter jets. Under the pretext of fighting against suspected Palestinian militants, the army continued its illegal policy of extrajudicial executions of Palestinians. While recognizing Israel's right to security, the Committee vigorously condemned the policy and practice of targeted assassinations, emphasizing that such actions were inadmissible under international humanitarian law. It also strongly condemned all terrorist attacks against civilians in Israel, which had no moral justification and harmed the cause of peace and reconciliation between the parties.

20. The Committee remained greatly concerned about the continuing restrictions placed on the movement of Chairman Arafat, who had been confined for the Israeli army to his Headquarters, the *Muqataa*, in Ramallah, and called upon the lifting of the siege. Chairman Arafat's ability to exercise his political leadership and supervise the work of the Palestinian Authority had been affected by these illegal measures of the occupying Power. The Committee was alarmed by the decision of the Israeli Security Cabinet, on 14 September 2003, to "remove" Chairman Arafat. The Committee was particularly worried by the explicit calls made by members of the Israeli Government and senior government officials to kill Chairman Arafat. In this connection, the Committee emphasized that the Israeli Government should refrain forthwith from making any statements that might incite violence, especially from making direct threats to Chairman Arafat's personal safety. The occupying Power should also abide by international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, recognize that Chairman Arafat remained the elected leader of the Palestinian people and allow him full freedom of movement.

21. Israel continued its territorial expansion through the illegal construction of settlements and outposts, road networks and the demolition of Palestinian homes and property. The Road Map required that Israel immediately dismantle settlement outposts erected since March 2001 and, consistent with the Mitchell Report, freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth of settlements. The removal of some outposts was quickly followed by the construction of new ones by settlers. There was no real improvement in the situation concerning the outposts. Over the year, the Committee followed with growing concern the construction of new and expansion of existing settlements and infrastructure in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and Israel's obligations under the Road Map. According to reports available to the Committee, in January 2003, the "Aperion" settlement was established, east of Salfit in the West Bank. In February and March 2003, tenders were published by the Israeli Ministry of Housing and Construction for the construction of 51 housing units in the Olive Hill section of "Efrat" and 24 units in "Ariel". Another tender was published in *Yediot Ahronot* for the sale of 28 housing plots in "Elkana". In early May 2003, the cornerstone for 72 new units was laid in "Beit El", north of Ramallah. Also in May 2003, the Ministry of Housing and Construction announced plans for the construction of 11,806 units in "Givat Ze'ev", "Ariel", "Betar Ilit", "Geva Binyamin" and "Ma'ale Adumim". In June 2003, the Israeli army began construction of a settlement road leading to a bridge linking the Al-Matahin road in the Gaza Strip to the bridge between the "Katif" block of settlements with "Kissufim". In late June 2003, a new bypass road connecting West Bank settlements of "Ariel" and "Rehelim" was opened, as well as a new settlement road north of "Morag" in the Gaza Strip. At the end of July 2003, the Israel Lands Authority issued a tender to build 22 new housing units in "Neveh Dekalim" in the Gaza Strip. In August, the Israeli Government issued a tender for the construction of 72

apartments in the "Har Homa" settlement in the Jabal Abu Ghneim neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. In early September 2003, the Ministry of Housing and Construction issued a tender for 102 new housing units in "Efrat". In early October 2003, the Ministry issued another tender for 604 units in "Ma'ale Adumim", "Betar Ilit" and "Ariel". The illegal settlement activity has already dramatically changed the status quo and adversely affected the implementation of the Road Map.

22. The Israeli Government's stepped up illegal construction of a wall in the West Bank, which, in many sections, runs to the east of the Green Line. In some areas, the wall is located as deep as 6 kilometres inside the West Bank. In addition to the construction of the wall itself, there were plans for depth barriers, 150 metres in length, to be erected a few kilometres away from the main wall, designed to funnel access into communities east of the wall through a limited number of checkpoints. The work on the structure, carried out in phases, was especially intensive in the Tulkarm and Qalqilya Governorates. Qalqilya has been almost completely surrounded by the wall. On 31 July 2003, the Israeli Ministry of Defence announced that the construction of Phase 1 of the barrier had been completed. Its 145 kilometre route runs from the village of Salem in the north to the "Elkana" settlement, south-east of Qalqilya. During the construction, Palestinian homes were demolished and swathes of lands were bulldozed and seized. The completed construction has already resulted in the unlawful confiscation of 2,850 acres of high-income Palestinian land. Over 50 communities along the wall's path have been affected. In August 2003, the Israeli authorities issued land expropriation orders for the "Jerusalem Envelope" barrier, which could leave some 50,000 Palestinians isolated on the Israeli side. In early September 2003, the Treasury decided to provide an additional 500 million new shekels (about $112 million) to complete the separation barrier in the Jerusalem area. The construction of the wall and the de facto annexation of Palestinian land will have serious economic and social consequences for the over 210,000 Palestinians living in 67 towns and villages. On 1 October 2003, the Israeli Cabinet approved the second phase of the wall, running from "Elkana" to Jerusalem, where a separate network of barriers was being built. The Committee was especially concerned about dangerous plans to erect the wall east of the settlements of "Ariel", "Kedumim" and "Immanuel", extending the wall in these areas some 20 kilometres into the West Bank. The construction, carried out in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, will disrupt the delivery of basic social services and impoverish the affected communities. It is also bound to exacerbate tensions and heighten resentment among the Palestinian population. In the longer term, like the settlements and bypass roads, it could prejudice the outcome of future permanent status negotiations and inhibit the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian State.

23. According to the Israeli Interior Ministry figures released in July 2003, 5,415 new settlers have moved into the Occupied Palestinian Territory since January 2003, bringing the total number to 231,443. The settler population continued to increase, in flagrant violation of article 49 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949 (the Fourth Geneva Convention).[9] Some 10,000 weapons are in the hands of settlers. In addition, the settlers' "territorial units" possess heavy arms, machine-guns and mortars. During the past year, in particular, attacks by settlers on Palestinians have become increasingly aggressive and violent, taking many forms. Their actions were intended to intimidate, deter or punish Palestinians, using firearms and ammunition provided by the Israeli army. There were reports of settlers killing and beating Palestinians

who were going about their daily chores. Settlers frequently attacked and harassed Palestinian farmers, merchants, schoolchildren and clerics. They also opened fire on farmers, destroyed or damaged property by cutting down trees, sprayed cultivated fields with chemicals, shot at roof-top water heaters and set cars and other property on fire. Some of their actions were intended to force Palestinians to abandon their land so that it could be confiscated or annexed to settlements. There were disturbing reports that an underground vigilante settler network had emerged in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. In July 2003, a group of nine settlers from the Hebron area was arrested on suspicion of carrying out roadside shootings of at least nine Palestinians and wounding dozens of others. Members of this violent underground cell were skilled snipers who had acquired skills in the use of firearms and explosives during their military service. In late September 2003, another group of settlers belonging to an anti-Palestinian terrorist network was arrested. Members of the group had planned to perpetrate mass killing of Palestinians in retaliation for anti-Israeli attacks. The Committee reiterated that the presence of the settlers violated international humanitarian law, in particular article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

24. The Committee noted that the situation with respect to Palestinian prisoners remained unresolved. It was estimated that some 6,500 prisoners were kept in Israeli detention facilities. The Israeli army was also holding 687 Palestinians in administrative detention. Children remained the most vulnerable group affected by the occupation. The Committee was particularly disquieted by the fact that at the end of June 2003 some 350 child prisoners were held in Israeli prisons. More than 9 per cent were 13 and 14-year-olds. The minors were subjected to various kinds of mistreatment and torture. The question of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli detention facilities remained largely unresolved and required the most urgent and serious attention of the Israeli Government. The Committee also stressed that the issue of prisoners was a highly important and painful one for thousands of Palestinian families. Its resolution was seen by the Committee as a major step towards building confidence between the parties. The Committee has repeatedly called upon the Government of Israel to abide by its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and to find a solution to the issue of prisoners.

25. The humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained dire. The most significant impediment to the recovery of the Palestinian economy and improvement in the humanitarian situation was the closure regime. Because of the closures, both internal and external, many Palestinian cities and villages experienced considerable access problems, with Palestinians having to use long detours to reach their jobs, medical facilities or schools. Although the movement of people and goods in recent months was eased in some areas, frequent incursions by the Israeli army into Palestinian areas, the reestablishment of roadblocks and the imposition of closures and curfews continued to stifle the Palestinian livelihood. Following the transfer of security responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip, Palestinians were still unable to move around freely. Such restrictions, combined with Israeli military operations, have virtually paralyzed economic life in the Occupied Territory. The Palestinian economy remained in a precarious state. Closures made jobs and markets in Israel completely inaccessible to Palestinians. The tourism sector, traditionally one of the most important revenue-generating sectors of the Palestinian economy, has sustained serious damage, since tourists have stayed away because of the violence. Vast areas of agricultural land have been

destroyed and many fields classified as off limits to Palestinians. Great damage has been inflicted on the physical infrastructure. All economic indicators continued to decline steeply. Overall national income losses between September 2000 and May 2003 reached $5.4 billion, and unemployment and poverty rates have reached unprecedented levels. By conservative estimates, the unemployment rate stood at 53 per cent. The financial situation of the Palestinian Authority was extremely difficult and its capacity to function was greatly weakened. A total collapse of the Palestinian economy was only prevented owing to the infusion of substantial foreign assistance.

26. Water in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained a scarce commodity. Some 178 Palestinian communities had no water distribution networks. There was evidence that the number of water-related diseases had increased in communities using contaminated water. Constant water shortages and the worsening hygiene situation affected health and living conditions of thousands of families. The problem has become even more acute with the construction of the separation wall. The route of the wall would limit Palestinian access to water wells, some of the best in the West Bank. Because of its position atop the western groundwater basin, the wall would have a severe impact on water access, use and allocation. Phase 1 of the wall has already affected at least 50 communal wells, meaning that they are either isolated west of the wall or in the "buffer zone" east of the wall. It has also led to the destruction of some 35 kilometres of water pipes.

27. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continued to provide Palestinian refugees with a broad range of essential services, although its vitally important work was hampered by closures, curfews and chronic funding shortages. UNRWA needed the sustained support of the donors, as it struggled to cope with budget shortfalls and increased requests for services. The Committee reaffirmed its position that it was the occupying Power that had the prime responsibility for the humanitarian well-being of the Palestinian population under occupation. Underfunding of its emergency appeals was a growing concern for the Agency. Funds were needed to preserve vital programmes in numerous areas, including food aid, shelter repair and reconstruction, temporary job creation, remedial health and education and psychosocial support. The Committee continued to support the Agency and called upon donors to contribute generously so that UNRWA could maintain its important activities for the benefit of Palestine refugees. The Committee also noted the crucial role played by the Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in rendering various forms of humanitarian and developmental assistance to the Palestinian people. The Committee noted with appreciation that, through allocation of funds, UNDP also supported the Road Map and the Palestinian reform plan. The Committee was appreciative to other United Nations system entities for providing assistance and essential services to the Palestinian people.

Chapter V

Action taken by the Committee

A. Action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 57/107

28. In pursuance of its mandate, the Committee continued to mobilize the international community in support of the Palestinian people, in cooperation with United Nations bodies, Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and others, as indicated below.

1. Action in the General Assembly and the Security Council

(a) Resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly

29. On 19 September 2003, the emergency special session was resumed (ninth resumption) at the request of the Permanent Representative of the Sudan, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Arab States for the month of September 2003 (A/ES-10/237), to discuss the situation on the ground under the item entitled "Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory". The Vice-Chairman of the Committee (Cuba) took part in the debate and made a statement (A/ES-10/PV.20). At the end of the debate, on the same day, the Assembly adopted resolution ES-10/12.

(b) Security Council meetings

30. During the year, against the backdrop of the highly dangerous situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, the Security Council has followed the situation on the ground and efforts to implement the Road Map. Throughout the year, the Council held monthly briefings under agenda item "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

31. At its 4681st meeting, on 20 December 2002, the Council considered the agenda item and voted on a draft resolution submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2002/1385). The draft received 12 votes in favour, 1 against and 2 abstentions. The draft was not adopted owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Council (S/PV.4681).

32. On 12 September 2003, the President of the Council issued a press statement under the agenda item, and in particular in connection with the Israeli decision in principle to expel Chairman Arafat (SC/7871).

33. At the request of the Permanent Representative of the Sudan, in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of September 2003 (S/2003/880), the Security Council met on 15 and 16 September 2003. The Chairman of the Committee took part in the debate and made a statement. At its 4828th meeting on 16 September 2003, the Council voted on a draft resolution submitted by Pakistan, South Africa, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2003/891). The draft received 11 votes in favour, 1 against and 3 abstentions. The draft resolution was not adopted owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Council (S/PV.4828).

2. Communications to the Secretary-General

34. The Chairman of the Committee has continued to bring to the attention of the Secretary-General the Committee's concerns about the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (A/ES-10/214-S/2003/120, A/ES-10/218-S/2003/202 and A/ES-10/230-S/2003/730).

3. Statements by the Committee

35. At its 271st meeting, on 6 May 2003, the Committee adopted a statement welcoming the presentation of the Road Map, and other important developments, including the confirmation by the Palestine Legislative Council of a new Palestinian Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Abbas. The statement was issued as a press release (GA/PAL/912).

4. Participation by the Chairman of the Committee at international conferences and meetings

36. During the year, the Chairman of the Committee participated in meetings of intergovernmental bodies and contributed to their deliberations in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as follows:

(a) Thirteenth Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, Kuala Lumpur, 20 to 25 February 2003;

(b) Third Ordinary Session of the Executive Council and the Second Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, Maputo, 4 to 12 July 2003;

(c) Ministerial meeting of the Committee on Palestine of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, Headquarters, 26 September 2003.

37. As in previous years, the Committee continued to follow the activities relevant to the question of Palestine of other intergovernmental organizations, as well as decisions and resolutions of United Nations bodies and agencies.

B. Action taken by the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 57/107 and 57/108

1. Programme of international meetings and conferences

38. In its programme of international meetings and conferences, the Committee continued to give priority to promoting the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, supporting the political process and stressing the need for the implementation of the Road Map. The Committee urged the international community to continue to provide political support, as well as humanitarian relief and economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

39. In the reviewed period, the following international events have been held under the auspices of the Committee:

(a) United Nations International Meeting in Support of Middle East Peace, Kyiv, 13 and 14 May 2003;

(b) Public Forum in Support of Middle East Peace, Kyiv, 15 May 2003;

(c) United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, United Nations Office at Geneva, 15 and 16 July 2003;

(d) Consultations of the Committee with Civil Society Organizations, United Nations Office at Geneva, 16 July 2003;

(e) United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People, United Nations Headquarters, 4 and 5 September 2003.

40. All the aforementioned events were attended by representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and United Nations system entities, as well by experts, media representatives, academics and students. The reports of the meetings were issued as publications of the Division for Palestinian Rights and were made available through the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) and the Division's web site.

41. In the course of the meetings in Kyiv, the Committee delegation was received by Leonid Kuchma, President of Ukraine, and Anatoliy Zlenko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, both of whom stressed the importance of supporting peace in the Middle East and welcomed the efforts of the Committee in that regard. The Committee expressed its great appreciation to the Government of Ukraine for having provided a venue and facilities for events sponsored by the Committee.

2. Cooperation with intergovernmental organizations

42. During the year, the Committee, through its Bureau, continued to maintain its cooperation on the question of Palestine with States Members of the European Union. In September 2003, the Bureau held a meeting of consultations with representatives of the European Union (under the Presidency of Italy) as part of the continued effort to build a constructive relationship with members of the Union on issues of common concern.

43. Throughout the year, the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights met, both at and away from United Nations Headquarters, with members of the general public to brief them on the various aspects of the question of Palestine and the involvement of the United Nations in this issue.

3. Cooperation with civil society

Civil society organizations

44. The Committee continued to enhance its cooperation with NGOs, academic institutions, think tanks and media representatives. It followed with interest the manifold activities of civil society organizations in various parts of the world, including in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in Israel, and expressed its appreciation for their useful and committed work. The Committee highly appreciated the work of those NGOs that provided emergency relief at a difficult time for the Palestinian people. It commended the courage and imaginative activism of those NGO representatives who went to Palestinian towns and villages under Israeli military siege. It encouraged all of them to continue their activities and to engage vigorously to ensure that the implementation of the Road Map truly

addresses the issue of Palestinian self-determination in a State free of occupation. The Committee stressed that there was a greater need for sustained campaigns aimed at informing public opinion about the root causes of the conflict and the legitimate rights of the parties and promoting national and international action in support of effective steps to end the crisis and to resume negotiations.

45. The Committee also maintained and developed its liaison with national, regional and international coordinating mechanisms accredited to it, in addition to the already established liaison with a large number of individual NGOs. Representatives of civil society participated in all meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee, including the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people on 29 November. In the reviewed period, the Committee has also accredited additional NGOs. Consultations between the delegation of the Committee and representatives of civil society organizations accredited to the Committee were held on 16 July 2003 at the United Nations Office at Geneva, following the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People. The participating NGO representatives provided information about their initiatives, campaigns and projects, described the obstacles they are facing on the ground in implementing their projects and asked the Committee to support concerted international action in support of the Palestinian people. The delegation of the Committee recommended to the NGO representatives to base their initiatives on international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The Chairman of the Committee met throughout the year with representatives of civil society organizations either in New York or at the site of meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee. The International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People, held at United Nations Headquarters in New York, once again provided ample opportunities for numerous discussions of the future cooperation between the Committee and civil society.

46. The Division for Palestinian Rights maintained its Internet web site entitled "NGO Network on the Question of Palestine" as a permanent tool of mutual information and cooperation between civil society and the Committee. The web site can be found at: www.un.org/depts/dpa/ngo. The Division also continued to issue its bimonthly newsletter, *NGO Action News*, covering the activities of civil society on the various aspects of the question of Palestine.

Parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations

47. The Committee continued to develop its liaison with national and regional parliaments and their organizations and invited a number of parliamentarians to speak at its meetings. The Chairman of the Committee welcomed the decision by the General Assembly to grant observer status to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The delegation of the Committee met on 16 July 2003 at the United Nations Office at Geneva with the Secretary-General of IPU and the Chairman and members of its Committee on Middle East Questions. The Chairman of the Committee commended the IPU efforts in support of the Palestinian people, in particular in promoting a dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian parliamentarians. It was agreed to continue periodic consultations between the two sides and to invite parliamentarians to address the different meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee.

4. Research, monitoring and publications

48. The Committee continued to attach great importance to the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights in support of its mandate and implementation of its annual programme of work. The Committee requested the Division to continue its established programme of work, including studies, information notes and other publications; the further development of UNISPAL; the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

49. Accordingly, the Division continued to respond to requests for information and briefings on the question of Palestine and to prepare for dissemination, including through UNISPAL, the following publications, the continued relevance of which was acknowledged by the Committee:

(a) Monthly bulletin on United Nations and intergovernmental organization action relating to the question of Palestine;

(b) Monthly chronology of developments relating to the question of Palestine based on media reports and other sources;

(c) Reports of meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee;

(d) Special bulletin and note on the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People;

(e) Periodic reviews of developments relating to Middle East peace efforts;

(f) Annual compilation of resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly and the Security Council relating to the question of Palestine.

5. United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

50. The Division for Palestinian Rights, in cooperation with relevant technical and library services of the Secretariat, continued to maintain and develop UNISPAL, as mandated by the General Assembly since 1991. This included the ongoing upgrading of the system's technical components to ensure its uninterrupted presence on the Internet, notably via UNISPAL's "Question of Palestine" interface on the United Nations home page, under "Peace and Security", and involved the expansion of the documents collection with relevant documents, both new and old. In addition, steps were taken to enhance the user-friendliness of accessing and navigating the system, leading to the launching of a substantially redesigned UNISPAL Internet presence (http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf).

6. Training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority

51. Two staff members from the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of the Palestinian Authority participated in a training programme conducted by the Division, from September to December 2002, in conjunction with the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly. They familiarized themselves with various aspects of the work of the United Nations Secretariat and other organs, and conducted research and prepared papers on specific topics.

7. International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

52. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was observed on 29 November 2002 at United Nations Headquarters and at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna. On the occasion of the observance at Headquarters, in addition to a solemn meeting of the Committee and other activities, an exhibit entitled "Palestinian cities: Images of life from the turn of the 20th century" was presented by the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, under the auspices of the Committee. The Committee noted with appreciation that the International Day of Solidarity had also been observed in many other cities throughout the world. Details on the observance are contained in the special bulletin issued by the Division.

53. In adopting its programme of work, the Committee decided that a similar observance of the International Day of Solidarity should be organized in 2003.

Chapter VI

Action taken by the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 57/109

54. The Department of Public Information, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/109, continued to implement its special information programme on the question of Palestine. It carried out this work in close cooperation with the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Department of Political Affairs and, through the Division, with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

55. The question of Palestine continued to be extensively covered by the United Nations News Service and featured prominently on the United Nations News Centre web site (www.un.org/news). The launch in January 2003 of the Arabic version of the web site was an important step in bringing the latest information about United Nations action on the question of Palestine to Arabic-speaking readers in the region and around the world.

56. Various aspects of the question of Palestine are covered on the global issues web site on the United Nations home page (www.un.org), including United Nations system programmes, activities and statements, news and events, documents, educational and promotional resources and partnerships with civil society.

57. The Radio Section provided extensive coverage of the various aspects of the question of Palestine and related issues in its daily live broadcasts in the official and non-official languages.

58. The Television Section of the United Nations Information Service at the United Nations Office at Geneva gave wide coverage to discussions on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, notably during the session of the Commission on Human Rights.

59. From 3 March to 11 April 2003, the Department organized a training programme at Headquarters, in Washington, D.C., and in Geneva for a group of eight Palestinian broadcasters and journalists, with a view to strengthening their professional capacity as information media personnel.

60. The Department's revised and updated publication, "The Question of Palestine and the United Nations" (DPI/2276), was issued in Arabic, English, French, Russian, and Spanish, disseminated to all United Nations offices and placed on the United Nations web site.

61. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library continued its cooperation with the Division for Palestinian Rights on digitizing relevant United Nations documents on the question of Palestine to expand the UNISPAL collection. The Department, in cooperation with the Committee, has completed a project involving the conversion and remastering of United Nations films and videos on the question of Palestine covering the period from 1947 to 2000.

62. The updated permanent exhibit "The United Nations and the Question of Palestine" is now on display in the General Assembly Hall at United Nations Headquarters. Its French-language is on semi-permanent display at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

63. The *UN Chronicle* reported on events related to the question of Palestine and action taken by the General Assembly and Security Council.

64. The question of Palestine was the subject of briefings organized by the Department of Public Information for eight visiting groups, primarily university students.

65. In January 2003, over 200 people attended a briefing organized by the Department's NGO Section entitled "Prejudice: Psychoanalytic perspectives on Arab-Israeli relations".

66. DPI's Video Section produced a *World Chronicle* programme with Mr. Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, entitled "Palestine Refugees: Present and Future Challenges".

67. The network of United Nations information centres, services and offices continued to disseminate information on the question of Palestine and to organize special outreach activities. Press releases, Op-Ed pieces, statements, documents, audio-visual material, reports and studies were brought to the attention of target audiences, posted on web sites and made available to visitors of the reference libraries maintained by their offices.

68. A major focus of this work was the promotion of the International Day for Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Special events and activities to observe the event were organized by information centres, services and offices in Accra, Bonn, Brussels, Cairo, Geneva, Harare, Jakarta, Kyiv, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Mexico City, Pretoria and Vienna.

69. The United Nations information centres in London and Pretoria assisted the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East, Mr. Terje Rød-Larsen, during his visits to South Africa and the United Kingdom, in December 2002 and January 2003, respectively. The information centre in London organized a media encounter with the Special Coordinator and arranged meetings with journalists from *The Financial Times*, *Reuters* and the *BBC*. The centre also provided assistance to the Special Coordinator and his delegation during a meeting of the Task Force on Palestinian Reform and a donors meeting organized by the Foreign Office in London in February 2003. The information centre in Paris provided assistance to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA during his visit to France. The centre in Cairo provided support to the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories during its mission to the region from 13 to 17 June 2003. As a result of media outreach by the information centre in Cairo, there was extensive coverage of the Special Committee's visit and activities in Egypt. The information centres in Jakarta, Lisbon, Mexico City, New Delhi, Panama City, Paris, Pretoria, Rabat, Rome, and Vienna translated, widely disseminated and arranged for the placement in local newspapers of Op-Eds and articles by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, including one entitled "Hunger in Palestine" and another entitled "Intifada, curfews rob Palestinian children of an education". The centre in Tunis participated in an academic seminar on peace in the Middle East and added a special page on its web site, providing detailed information on the Road Map.

70. The annual training programme for Palestinian media practitioners at Headquarters was postponed from 2002 to 2003 due to delays in obtaining entry visas. The Department was unable to conduct a news mission to the region in 2003

because of the difficult circumstances in the region. The Department is organizing an international media seminar on peace in the Middle East in Seville, Spain, on 21 and 22 October 2003, in cooperation with the Foundation of the Three Cultures of the Mediterranean, and has decided not to hold a regional encounter in 2003.

Chapter VII

Conclusions and recommendations of the Committee

71. During the period under review, and especially since the presentation of the Road Map, the Committee has remained concerned about the lack of serious headway in the political process. The Committee has also been dismayed by the absence of any tangible improvement in the security area. It noted with much regret that the initial positive steps aimed at creating confidence between the parties had collapsed, stalling the political process. The Committee remained hopeful that the situation could be redressed through the efforts of the Quartet, its individual members and other regional and international players. It also emphasized that the United Nations should maintain its permanent responsibility with respect to all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions, in accordance with international legitimacy and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized. The Committee also stressed the critical peacemaking role played by the Security Council. It was of the view that the Council could and should, inter alia, encourage steps towards creating an effective mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the Road Map and for protection of the Palestinian population, including through authorizing the deployment of international observers.

72. In all its activities, the Committee intends to continue to promote support for the Road Map and the important work of the Quartet in pursuance of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and other relevant resolutions and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights.

73. The Committee stresses its strong opposition to the illegal construction by the occupying Power of the wall in the Occupied West Bank and in areas close to East Jerusalem. The Committee reminds the Government of Israel that this construction has devastating immediate and longer-term implications for the livelihood of the Palestinian people. The construction also endangers international efforts aimed at resolving the conflict and realizing the vision of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, would live side by side in peace and security, as outlined in the Road Map. With these concerns in mind, the Committee calls upon the international community, most notably the Security Council and the General Assembly, to attach the necessary importance to this issue, with a view to stopping the de facto annexation of Palestinian land and the construction of the wall by the occupying Power.

74. The Committee considers that its programme of international and regional meetings and conferences helps to promote a constructive analysis and discussion of the various aspects of the question of Palestine and mobilize international assistance to the Palestinian people as well as contributing to heightening awareness of the root cause of the conflict, namely the occupation by Israel of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The programme is also aimed at mobilizing international efforts to resolve the conflict by peaceful means. The Committee highly appreciates the involvement

in these meetings of Governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society. It will continue its programme of meetings to foster support for the attainment by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights in accordance with international law and the resolutions of the Security Council and General Assembly. In its meetings next year, the Committee intends to address such issues as the status of the peace process and the implementation of the Road Map, the security situation and the importance of protecting the Palestinian people, the illegal construction of the wall and its implications, the humanitarian and socio-economic situation, including the plight of Palestinian women, and the further involvement of civil society.

75. The Committee commends civil society organizations for their efforts at upholding international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and the mobilization of public opinion, as well as for their unremitting initiatives to provide relief and assistance to the Palestinian people. It encourages NGOs to enhance cooperation and coordination of their activities on the ground, as well as at the national and international levels, through forming national platforms or campaigns and international coordinating mechanisms. The Committee invites accredited civil society organizations, academic institutions, think tanks and the media to share their insights into and reports on the situation on the ground and other relevant initiatives, including at meetings organized under the Committee's auspices. In its programme of meetings, the Committee, will pay special attention to enhancing the involvement of parliamentarians and their regional and international organizations.

76. The Committee stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's objectives and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other informational activities, including the further development of the UNISPAL documents collection. The Committee also considers that, in spite of the difficulties on the ground, the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority has continued to demonstrate its usefulness and requests that it be continued.

77. The Committee is of the view that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion on the relevant issues. The Committee requests the programme's continuation, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

78. Wishing to make its contribution to the achievement of a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, and in view of the many difficulties facing the Palestinian people and besetting the peace process, the Committee calls on all States to join in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly once again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/31/35).

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/32/35); ibid., *Thirty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/33/35); ibid., *Thirty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* and corrigendum (A/34/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/35/35); ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/36/35); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* and corrigendum (A/37/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/38/35); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/39/35); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/40/35); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/41/35); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/42/35); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/43/35); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/44/35); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/45/35); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/46/35); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/47/35); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/48/35); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/49/35); ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/50/35); ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/51/35); ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/52/35); ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/53/35); ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/54/35); ibid., *Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/55/35); ibid., *Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* and corrigendum (A/56/35 and Corr.1); and ibid. *Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/57/35).

[3] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/57/35), chap. VII.

[4] A/AC.183/2003/CRP.1.

[5] The observers at the Committee meetings were as follows: Algeria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Nicaragua, Niger, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, Yemen, African Union, League of Arab States, Organization of the Islamic Conference and Palestine.

[6] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 75, No. 973.

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